MENTORING, REVERSE MENTORING IN CONNECTION TO INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION

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Abstract— Mentoring is used in many forms in many organizations today as an effective way of transferring knowledge between employees, as well as socializing new recruits. Over time, new forms of mentoring have emerged, one of which is reverse mentoring. This involves the transfer of ICT skills and digital competences to older employees.

Mentoring and reverse mentoring can be very effective at the same time. It is a transfer of knowledge and experience in both directions, with the roles of mentor and mentee alternating. This is also the approach we propose in our paper, in which we have developed the content and programme of a mentoring and reverse mentoring scheme, using the example of an administrative and technical services department. In particular, we aim to help the company optimise the transfer of knowledge between employees. The positive effects will also be seen in improved employee relations, better organizational culture and energy, and the company will save on the costs of providing learning, education and training for its employees.

At the same time, it is important to remember that a key factor influencing the success of mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes in a company is the acceptance and active involvement of employees in these programmes. Otherwise, the implementation of the programmes will never produce the desired results.

In this paper, we have therefore also focused on the development of proposals to encourage employees to actively participate in mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes. In this way, we aim to improve the results of these programmes and, as a result, to help improve intergenerational cooperation in the company.

In this way, we will also help the company to implement the programmes designed and to achieve the objectives of the implementation of these programmes in the company.

Index Terms—mentoring, reverse mentoring, peer mentoring, intergenerational cooperation, employee relations, employee networking

I.   INTRODUCTION

Organizations are spending more and more time looking at how to achieve the optimum level of knowledge and competencies for all employees, according to the requirements of their jobs. They are aware that in today's fast-changing environment, the competence of their employees is key to maintaining the success of the organization. The concept of the learning organization is being promoted in many companies as a sustainable way of exchanging knowledge and competencies between employees in a way that benefits all participants. It is about the optimal use and exchange

of knowledge between employees to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, employee competence, and employee empowerment [1], [2]. Mentoring and reverse mentoring are also very effective ways of sharing knowledge. They can be used by companies separately or together with the learning organization model [3]. Mentoring is established as a process of individual development, both within companies and more broadly. It has a rich history, having been present among some of the world's most famous personalities, such as Haydn and Beethoven, Freud and Jung, etc. As for mentoring in our times, we can find its origins in the concept of apprenticeship, where masters introduce their apprentices. The greatest development of mentoring has been in the USA, but also in the UK, Australia, and parts of Europe [4].

Mentoring is a personal relationship based on support that benefits all participants and contributes to their development [5]. Employee development is also a reason for the use of mentoring in organizations [6]. Other reasons are to improve the organizational culture, and employee accountability and to improve the skills and competencies of employees. Mentoring also helps to retain talented employees in the organization. Mentoring is also often implemented as part of the socialization of recruits or for the re-socialisation of long-term absent employees [7], [8]. Our study aimed to determine the impact of mentoring and reverse mentoring on intergenerational cooperation in organizations. The research question was: Are mentoring and reverse mentoring effective methods for improving intergenerational cooperation in organizations? The study provides a comprehensive overview of the field using the method of analysis. The theoretical foundations of the field were described using the descriptive method and explained using the explicative method. In the following, the synthesis and deduction methods were used to develop a model of mentoring and reverse mentoring.

The history and benefits of mentoring

Mentoring was informal until the end of the 20th century, but by the end of the 20th century, formal mentoring was becoming more common in organizations. Formal mentoring is planned and structured [4], [9]. In formal mentoring, the mentor receives a salary supplement (called a mentoring allowance) and, if the mentoring is successfully carried out, the mentor also gains a reputation and the respect and goodwill of the staff. Informal mentoring has the advantage of flexibility and adaptability and is sometimes even more effective [10].

The complexity of the mentoring process is also reflected in the large number of different factors that influence its success [11], [12]:
- The mentor's openness to sharing knowledge and competencies and taking responsibility.
- Responsiveness of the mentor and mentee.
- Sincerity, honesty, and objectivity of mentor and mentee.
- Acceptance of mentoring by mentor and mentee.
- Trust between mentor and mentee.
- Support for mentoring by owners and top management.
- General acceptance of mentoring by employees in the organization.

Mentoring is now the most common form of intergenerational collaboration and knowledge transfer between employees in organizations [14]. Mentoring has been established in many

organizations for a long time and is an activity through which organizations improve intergenerational collaboration in the workplace [15], [16], [17].

Mentoring benefits both the mentee (gaining new skills and experience, improved motivation and self-confidence, networking with new colleagues, getting feedback on their work, etc.) and the mentor (personal and career development, improved job satisfaction, gaining prestige and recognition in the organization, gaining new experience and, in the case of formal mentoring, a salary supplement, etc.), and the mentee (personal and career development, improved job satisfaction, gaining prestige and recognition in the organization, gaining new experience, etc.) and, of course, for the organization itself (better (re-)socialization of recruits, lower turnover, improved employee relations, improved organizational effectiveness, and efficiency, strengthened organizational culture, etc.) [18], [19], [20], [21], [22]. Mentoring is therefore a one-way process in which the mentor (the more senior employee) passes on his or her expertise to the mentee (junior employee) [23].

Today, organizations operate in an unpredictable environment with daily changes. This requires them to be responsive and adapt to change to maintain business performance and ensure continued growth and development. The intensive development of information and communication technology and digitalization brings with it challenges related to the lack of computer skills and digital competencies of employees. These shortcomings are even more common among older employees, who were not exposed to technology when they were young and are often reluctant to introduce innovation and change into the organization, which includes digitization and the introduction of ICT into organizations. According to the OECD [24], almost half of employees in organizations lack computer and digital skills and competencies. There is also a growing emphasis on the importance of employees adapting to changes and innovations taking place in the environment (project and platform work, new professions, multi-career, etc.) [24]. New technologies are causing jobs to disappear as more and more tasks can be performed by technology with the integration of artificial intelligence [25], [26], [27].

Younger employees are very familiar with modern technologies and are "digital natives". They are very tech-literate and use technology daily to improve personal efficiency and performance, to make everyday life easier, but also to relax and have fun [28], [29], [30]. It is this familiarity with technology that is a prerequisite for a younger employee to become a mentor to an older employee in the process of reverse mentoring. An additional advantage is the willingness to change and innovate, and the willingness to challenge and find solutions, which is crucial in modern world.
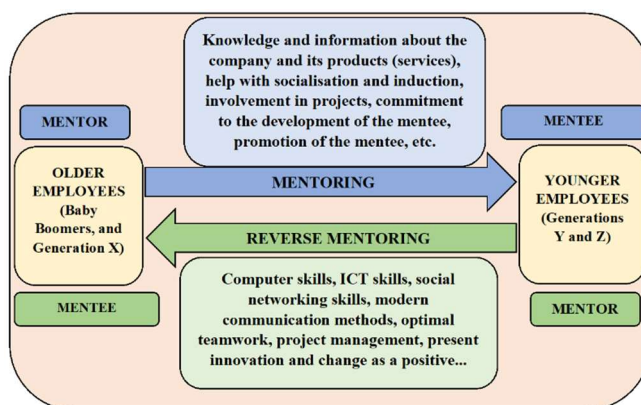
Reverse mentoring and its purpose

To complement knowledge sharing, organizations are introducing reverse mentoring. This involves the reversal of the roles of mentor and mentee (the younger person is the mentor, and the older person is the mentee), mainly in terms of the transfer of computer skills, teamwork, and project work competencies [31], [32].

In reverse mentoring, younger employees pass on their knowledge of technology, communication, social media, team and project work, etc. to their older colleagues. In this way, seniors also gain the skills to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently in an era of digitization

and integration of ICT into the workplace.

Reverse mentoring, therefore, complements "traditional" mentoring, as knowledge is also transferred in the reverse direction, i.e. younger people pass on knowledge to older people; for example, generation Y is a mentor to mentee from the Baby boom generation [33]. As a result, it makes sense to introduce mentoring and reverse mentoring simultaneously in an organization for optimal knowledge sharing. This ensures an optimal exchange of knowledge between generations, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 1: Mentoring and reverse mentoring

Source: adapted from [6, 13, 32]

When mentoring and reverse mentoring are carried out at the same time, it is called peer mentoring. In this case, both participants in the process learn and at the same time transfer their knowledge and competencies to the other participant. It is a dynamic process of exchange of knowledge and information between the participants [33]. Today's situation and market are relentless and require continuous learning and acquisition of new skills that are necessary for the normal functioning of organizations [34].

During the mentoring period (traditional, reverse, or reciprocal), the mentor and mentee become closer and their relationship becomes more personal. In today's unpredictable environment, it is peer relationships that are the source of social support, learning, and transfer of knowledge and other resources in organizations [34].

With this model, we also establish intergenerational cooperation and so we (1) ensure learning from each other, (2) help from one generation to another, (3) create, maintain, and (4) expand a social network and efficient operation of employees of different generations. So, the model is about a way of working and a system of bringing together different generations of employees to ensure mutual learning, cooperation, respect, and understanding, based on mentoring and reverse mentoring [22].

This model, precisely because of intergenerational cooperation, is established in a modern environment, and mutual mentoring is also established, which means that mentoring and reverse mentoring take place simultaneously.

Formal mentoring model

Before implementation, a formal mentoring program should be set up in the organization. As a model example, we present below the model developed for company X, more specifically for the administrative and technical services department of this business. The design was based on existing policies and documents on mentoring and other forms of intergenerational cooperation in the company. We then analysed the past implementation of mentoring in the company and the results or impacts. The biggest challenge for the organization in terms of mentoring is the lack of interest of employees in getting involved in such programs. Thus, while developing a model for mentoring and reverse mentoring, we also developed proposals to encourage employee involvement in mentoring and reverse mentoring programs in the company. This will make the programs successful and will have the desired effects of improving employee skills, sharing knowledge and competencies, and improving employee interaction.

The model of the formal mentoring program that has been developed consists of several modules, namely a core module, and then, as an example for the administrative and technical services, we have developed career-specific modules for mentoring and reverse mentoring.

Table 1: Mentoring and reverse mentoring program modules

Core module	Profession-specific mentoring module	Profession-specific reverse mentoring module
Basic information about the company (company name, company departments, company bodies, business areas, activities, history, etc.).	Basic information on the administrative and technical services.	Basic information on the use of technology solutions in administrative and technical services.
The company's areas of work (familiarisation with the jobs, the induction process, the areas of work of each of the company's departments).	Surveying and technical services provided as internal support to other corporate services	
Challenges in the field of municipal activities, which the company faces as a consequence.	Administrative procedures	Digitisation of administrative and technical service documents
The projects being implemented in the company.	Management of roadblocks	Integration of technology in the different areas dealt with by the administrative and technical services
Internal policies, documents, and acts (e.g. mentoring policy, internship policy, job	Surveying and technical services provided as a commercial activity	

classification, etc.).	Eu projects	
Areas for potential new projects and past (already completed) projects.	Material resources	
	"Test Week"	"Test Week"

Source: own

The mentoring and reverse mentoring models developed are tailored to the content and areas covered by the administrative and technical services. The content of the reverse mentoring is based on learning digital competencies and acquiring computer and ICT skills to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the company's administrative and technical services. The introduction of reverse mentoring as a complement to traditional mentoring in the company will further improve the exchange of knowledge and experience between employees from different generations. They will thus acquire the missing skills and competencies that will help to improve their performance and efficiency.

Cooperation and knowledge sharing will also help to improve relations between employees, as members of different generations will get to know each other better and eliminate stereotypes about other generations. Younger employees will find it easier to integrate and socialize into the company and the field in which they will work, get to know their colleagues build relationships with them, and become actively involved in the company. Older employees will feel accepted, and capable and will not feel inferior or left out. This will lead to less stress and negative energy in the company and more job satisfaction. All this will also lead to better teamwork and better cooperation between people of the same generation and between people of different generations. As a consequence, this will improve intergenerational cooperation and interactions.

To start with, the mentoring and reverse mentoring programs to be implemented in the company should be introduced to the employees. The positive effects that the programs will bring to mentors and mentees should be highlighted. It is also necessary to present the process of implementing the two mentoring programs in the company and how the programs will be evaluated on an ongoing basis [17], [35]. To further improve employee engagement in the programs and to achieve the desired results of the two programs, we have also made some innovative suggestions:

- Identify ways to incentivize and reward employees for actively engaging in mentoring and reverse mentoring programs.
- Develop a reward system for the best mentors (both tangible and intangible).
- Organize an event at the end of the year (or more frequently) to highlight and reward the best mentors of the year.
- Publish an internal newsletter on mentoring, the "Mentor Messenger", which presents the company's current mentoring programs in the various units/departments.
- Issuing awards and commending mentors for their efforts and dedication.

These proposals will help to increase the active involvement of employees in the company's mentoring and reverse mentoring programs, thereby improving the results of these programs and achieving their objectives.

Conclusion

The mentoring and reverse mentoring model we have developed will help to improve or upgrade the existing mentoring system in the company. Mentoring programs can be formal or informal. Formal mentoring programs are the result of a planned effort by the organization to promote the transfer of knowledge and skills possessed by more experienced employees, thereby enabling the development of younger employees. The most important advantage of formal mentoring is the prevention of discrimination. In other words, formal mentoring allows all employees with development potential to join such programs, regardless of gender or any other potentially discriminatory factor. In addition to the above, such programs have a clearly defined structure, content, rules of conduct, and expected results, so program participants know exactly what is expected of them. The duration of formal mentoring programs is strictly defined, although the relationship between mentor and mentee may continue informally after the completion of the program if there is mutual interest and willingness [22].

The comprehensive formal model consists of a general part presenting the contents which, with appropriate minor adjustments or additions, are suitable for the implementation of mentoring at the level of the whole organization. The second part consists of the content with the identified prerequisite skills and competencies that are specific to each area of activity. We have developed a vocation-specific module for mentoring and reverse mentoring in the administrative and technical departments of a company. This section will also help the company to develop career-specific mentoring modules for other departments or services within the company.

It would also be useful to introduce a 'test week' in all departments at the end of the mentoring process, during which the mentee would independently perform all the necessary tasks and tasks that he/she has learned during the mentoring process. The mentor would then assess the mentee and give him/her comprehensive feedback on the knowledge acquired and, if necessary (in case of significant deviations and poor performance), take appropriate action or suggest possible improvements to the company's HR department.

The mentoring and reverse mentoring model also improves interpersonal relations and teamwork within the company, as well as intergenerational cooperation. In addition to the model, we have also developed proposals to encourage employees to actively participate in mentoring programs. The aim is to achieve general acceptance and affection among employees for mentoring and reverse mentoring programs, as well as other programs and activities in the company aimed at improving employee competencies, inter-employee relations, the organizational climate, and, of course, inter-generational cooperation. If successfully introduced and implemented, mentoring and reverse mentoring programs can also help to improve intergenerational cooperation. During the program, the mentor and mentee connect, exchange skills and experiences, get to know each other, and also adapt to each other. This helps to eliminate negative prejudices and stereotypes and to improve the perception of members of other generations, which is deeply rooted in many employees. As a result, intergenerational cooperation is improved through successful mentoring and reverse mentoring programs. The key is that both the mentor and the mentee are open to conversation, that they accept and try to understand different opinions, and that they are interested

in participating in the mentoring and reverse mentoring program in the first place.

In today's turbulent environment of constant change and innovation, employees need to continuously learn and acquire new knowledge and competencies even faster than in the past [36]. It is therefore highly recommended and reasonable to set up a platform or application for e-learning and training of employees in organizations. This application or platform, to which all employees have access, will enable the acquisition of new skills and the updating of existing skills. In addition, access is provided to all the necessary documents, acts, information, and other content relevant to employees, their development, well-being, job satisfaction, and ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of their work. All of this results in improved employee job satisfaction, higher levels of employee knowledge and competence, improved interpersonal relations, higher employee productivity, and, as a consequence, the maintenance or improvement of the organization's performance.

Today, new forms of mentoring are emerging in the context of mentoring, in particular e-mentoring and peer mentoring. E-mentoring is actually about training and knowledge transfer between mentor and mentee, supported by information technology and usually taking place remotely via various communication channels (such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.). In this case, the mentor and mentee can be in different locations, which is particularly useful in multinational companies. Peer mentoring, on the other hand, is peer-to-peer, i.e. both participants are both mentors and mentees, and both are from the same generation and age group (e.g. Generation Z, millennials, etc.).

In the future, it is recommended for research on intergenerational cooperation and its impact on intergenerational relations in organizations. It would also be advisable to develop an approach to encourage employees to engage in intergenerational cooperation and knowledge exchange programs within organizations.

Management will also need to spend more time engaging with employees to ensure that they are more committed and committed to the company and that, as a result, the human resources management activities that have been introduced (such as mentoring and reverse mentoring) achieve their purpose and produce the desired results.

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